

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10

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P R 251100Z FEB 78

FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1332

INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA

USCINCO QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ

CINCLANT NORFOLK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 CARACAS 1853

CINCLANT NORFOLK FOR POLAD

E.. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, VE

SUBJECT: THE 1978 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN - A STATUS REPORT
ON VENEZUELA DEMOCRACY IN ACTION

SUMMARY: THE SOCIAL CHRISTIAN (COPEI) CANDIDATE HERRERA
CAMPINS IS PRESENTLY THE 1978 FRONT-FUNNER, POLLING FOUR
TO SIX PERCENT IN FRONT OF THE GOVERNMENT-PARTY (AD)
CANDIDATE LUIS PINERUA ORDAZ IN EVERY REGION. COPEI'S
PRESENT STRENGTH IS BASED ON PINERUA'S LACKLUSTER CAMPAIGN,
POOR IMAGE, INTRA-PARTY FACTIONALISM AND POPULAR DISCONTENT
WITH THE INCUMBENT AD ADMINISTRATION. HERRERA HAS
SKILLFULLY CONDEMNED THE AD GOVERNMENT WHILE MOVING HIMSELF
TOWARD THE CENTER OF HIS OWN PARTY TO REDUCE HIS LEFT OF
CENTER REPUTATION. THE LEFTIST PARLIAMENTARY PARTIES
(PCV, MIR, MEP, MAS) HAVE BEEN RENT WITH FACTIONALISM
DURING THE LAST YEAR VIRTUALLY DESTROYING WHAT WAS ONCE
CONSIDERED A REAL POSSIBILITY THAT THE LEFT MIGHT
BECOME A MAJOR POLITICAL FORCE IN THE 1978 ELECTIONS.
THE POTENTIAL INDEPENDENT CANDIDACY OF RENNY OTTOLINA
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AMOUNTS TO LITTLE BUT BECOMES MORE IMPORTANT IN A CLOSE
RACE. IN SUM, WHILE MOST PEOPLE WOULD STILL BET ON A
PINERUA VICTORY IN DECEMBER, HERRERA AND COPEI SENSE THEY
HAVE A REAL CHANCE. THUS, THIS CAMPAIGN SHOULD PROVE TO
BE A REAL HORSE RACE, AND A VIVID EXPRESSION OF VENEZUELA'S
POLITICAL CULTURE. END SUMMARY

1. THE MAJOR PARTIES. THE PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN IS WELL UNDERWAY, ALTHOUGHT IT DOES NOT OFFICIALLY BEGIN UNTIL APRIL. AD CANDIDATE LUIS PINERUA ORDAZ NOT ONLY TRAILS COPEI'S LUIS HERRERA CAMPAIGN NATIONWIDE (6 PERCENT TO 4 PERCENT POINTS IN THE POLLS) BUT HAS YET TO TURN ON PARTY MILITANTS OR THE GENERAL POPULATION. FURTHER, THE AD CAMPAIGN IS HAMPERED BY LINGERING RESENTMENTS FROM THE BRUISING PARTY PRIMARY LAST YEAR, AND THE UNDERLYING STRUGGLE FOR DOMINATION OF THE PARTY'S FUTURE BETWEEN ROMULO BETANCOURT AND PRESIDENT PEREZ. THINGS NOW SEEM TO BE GOING WELL FOR THE HERRERA CAMPAIGN. ALTHOUGHT COPEI IS BY NO MEANS A MONOLITHIC PARTY, FOUNDING FATHER CALDERA IS FULLY BACKING THE HERRERA CANDIDACY, AND HERRERA HIMSELF IS MOVING RAPIDLY TO THE CENTER OF HIS PARTY TO MAINTAIN A BALANCE BETWEEN HIS PROGRESSIVE LEFT WING AND THE MORE CONSERVATIVE CALDERA FORCES. HERRERA'S POPULARITY IS ALSO ADIED BY WIDESPREAD VOTER RESENTMENT OF INADEQUATE SOCIAL SERVICES, INFLATION, FOOD SHORTAGES, PETTY CORRUPTION, AND PERSONAL INSECURITY, ALL DOMESTIC CONCERNS THAT DIRECTLY AFFECT THE AVERAGE CITIZEN. FURTHER, HERRERA HAS BEEN CAREFUL NOT TO CLEARLY ARTICULATE COLUTIONS YET, TO AVOID GIVING AD GROUNDS FOR A COUNTER TRUST, BUT HAS HAMMERED AWAY AT THE FAILURES OF THE AD GOVERNMENT. HIS CAMPAIGN POSTERS CARRY THE THEME "LUIS CAN FIX THIS," -- NO PROGRAM, NO PROMISES, SIMPLY CAN DO. AD'S SUPPORT, HOWEVER, LIES AMONG THE

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PEASANTS AND WORKERS, AND IS CONSIDERABLE. IT ALSO HAS SUBSTANTIAL CAMPAIGN FUNDS, AND CONTROLS THE GOVERNMENT MEDIA. ITS ORGANIZATIONAL DEPTY REACHES INTO EVERY HAMLET, WHEREAS COPEI LACKS SUPPORT AMONG POORER VENEZUELANES AND THE FINANCIAL RESOURCES AVAILABLE TO AD. FURTHER, PINERUA MAY HAVE A SLEEPER ATTRACTION IF AD GETS BEHIND HIM, PRECISELY BECAUSE OF HIS UTTER UNPRETENTIOUSNESS -- HE COULD BE A MAN WITH WHOM THE AVERAGE VOTER CAN IDENTIFY, PARTICULARLY AFTER THE INTERNATIONALIST THEMSE AND BOLIVARIAN PRETENTIONS OF CARLOS ANDRES PEREZ WHICH HAVE TURNED OFF MANY AND TIRED OTHERS. PINERUA'S CAMPAIGN POSTERS, IN FACT, PLAY UP ON HIS UNPREPOSSESSING PERSONALITY, SHOWING HIM WITH HIS WIFE WITH THE SLOGAN, "UN ANO CORRECTO," A CORRECT YEAR, I.E., INDUSTRY AND PROBITY ARE PINERUA'S OUTSTANDING QUALITIES. THE SLOGANS OF THE TWO MAJOR CANDIDATES SUGGEST CLEARLY THAT IT IS THE MAN (AND HIS PARTY) THAT ARE BEING SOLD TO THE PUBLIC, OTHER THAN PROGRAMS. THIS UNDERLINES THE FACT THAT THE PROGRAMS AND POLICIES OF AD AND COPEI WOULD NOT BE THAT DIFFERENT. THIS IS PARTICULARLY THE CASE WITH REGARD TO US INTERESTS.

2. THE OTHER CANDIDATES; THE LEFT, RIGHT, AND RENNY.

THE MOVIMIENTO AL SOCIALISMO (MAS), THE LARGEST OF THE MARXIST PARTIES OF VENEZUELA, WHICH GARNERED 5.3 PERCENT OF THE LEGISLATIVE VOTE IN 1973 AND WAS EXPECTED TO BECOME A MAJOR FORCE IN VENEZUELA POLITICS, HAS FALLEN ON HARD TIMES, AFFLICTED WITH INTERNAL BICKERING, PERSONAL DISPUTES, AND EMBARRASSING MUTUAL RECRIMINATIONS AMONG ITS LEADING MEMBERS. THE OTHER LEFTIST PARTIES, PCV, MIR, AND MEP AT ONE POINT PROPOSED THAT THE FOUR PARTIES UNITE BEHIND A SINGLE CANDIDATE OF THE LEFT. THE UNIFICATION DRIVE HAS STALLED ESSENTIALLY BECAUSE MAS HAS REFUSED TO GIVE UP ITS CANDIDATE, JOSE VINCENT RANGEL, PRECISELY BECAUSE IT FEELS IT IS THE STRONGEST LEFTIST PARTY. THE LEFT'S CAMPAIGN IS CONFRONTED NOT ONLY WITH INTERNAL FACTIONALISM, BUT ISSUES THAT GIVE THE INITIATIVE TO THE ALREADY POWERFUL

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COPEI RIVAL, SINCE NO ONE EXPECTS THE LEFT TO DO WELL THIS YEAR AND, IN FACT, IT COULD HAVE DIFFICULTY MAINTAINING THE STATUS QUO. THE RIGHT, IN THE FORM OF THE TWO PEREZ JIMENISTA PARTYIES, THE FRENTE UNIDO NACIONALISTA (FUN) AND THE CRUSADA CIVICA NACIONAL (CCN) WILL FIELD CANDIDATES, BUT THEY ESSENTIALLY REPRESENT A DISCREDITED PAST AND HAVE FEW FOLLOWERES OR ORGANIZATIONAL MUSCLE. THE UNION REPUBLICANA DEMOCRATICA (URD), ONCE THE THIRD MOST POWERFUL PARTY IN VENEZUELA, HAS TURNED INTO A HOLLOW SHELL, REPRESENTING LITTLE MORE THAN THE PERSONAL AMBITIONS OF

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
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TRSE-00 AID-05 EB-08 DOE-11 SOE-02 COME-00 /089 W
-----041579 251507Z /40

P R 251100Z FEB 78
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1333
INFO AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
USCINCO QUARRY HEIGHTS CZ
CINCLANT NORFOLK

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 CARACAS 1853

CINCLANT NORFOLK FOR POLAD

ITS FOUNDER, JOVITO VILLALBA WHO HAS APPRENTLY DECIDED NOT TO RUN AN INDEPENDENT CAMPAIGN, AND HAS BEEN FLIRTING WITH COPEI. URD HAS BEEN FURTHER WEAKENED BY FACTIONALISM, WITH A YOUNGER URD PROTEGE OF VILLALBA FOUNDING HIS OWN PARTY "MOVIMIENTO DE REINTREGACION NACIONAL" (MORENA). A LOCAL TV PERSONALITY, RENNY OTTOLINA, WELL KNOWN TO MILLIONS OF VENEZUELANS, HAS ENTERED THE PRESIDENTIAL RACE. OTTOLINA IS RUNNING ON AN ECLECTIC ANTI-POLITICS PLATFORM, CONDEMNING ALL THE TRADITIONAL PARTIES FOR INEFFICIENCY, CORRUPTION, AND FOR HAVING FORGOTTEN THE WELFARE OF THE MASSES. OTTOLINA, ALTHOUGH INDEPENDENTLY WEALTHY, DOES NOT HAVE SUFFICIENT RESOURCES TO RUN A YEAR LONG CAMPAIGN AND IS ALSO STRUGGLING TO OBTAIN THE 200,000 ODD SIGNATURES HE NEEDS TO REGISTER AS A CANDIDATE. HE HAS STATED HE WOULD NAME A CABINET OF QUALIFIED PERSONS, RANGING FROM MAS FOUNDER AND IDEOLOGUE TEODORO PETKOFF TO CONSERVATIVE ECONOMISTS. HE HAS PRESENTED NO POSITIVE IDEAS ABOUT HOW HE WOULD GOVERN, AND SOME OBSERVERS FEEL HE IS INCAPABLE OF PRESENTING A COHERENT PROGRAM. HOWEVER, HIS ANTI-POLITICS THEMESE MAY WELL STRIKE A CHORD WITH URBAN SLUM-
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DWELLERS WHERE HE IS SPENDING MOST OF HIS EFFORT, AND SOME POLLS LATE LAST YEAR SHOWED OTTOLINA LEADING MAS CANDIDATE RANGEL BY SEVERAL POINTS. OTTOLINA'S PRIMARY ROLE, SHOULD HE RUN, WOULD PROBABLY BE TO TAKE VOTES AWAY FROM THE LEFT, AND SPLIT THE "PROTEST" VOTE. FINALLY, A VENEZUELAN BUSINESSMAN, TOMAS ENRIQUE CARILLO BATALLA IS LEADING A GROUP OF INDEPENDENTS WHO CLAIM TO BE SEEKING THE VIEWS OF THE MASS OF THE INDEPENDENT VOTES. BATALLA'S GROUP HAS NOT REGISTERED AS A PARTY BUT MAY ATTEMPT TO DO SO AS THE CAMPAIGN PROGRESSES.

3. THE CAMPAIGN, AND VENEZUELAN POLITICAL CULTURE, DEMOCRACY WITH A DIFFERENCE. THE CAMPAIGN TO DATE HAS EMPHASIZED THE EXCESSES OF THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION, WASTE CORRUPTION, INEFFICIENCY AND BOTH PINERUA AND HERRERA'S SLOGANS POINT TO THE NEED FOR ORDER, SOBRIETY AND PROBITY IN THE CONDUCT OF THE PUBLIC BUSINESS. IN ADDITION, PARTISAN RHETORIC HAS, TO DATE AT LEAST, BEEN CONFINED TO ACCUSING THE "OTHER GUYS" OF BASIC INCOMPETENCE, BUT, WITH FEW EXCEPTIONS, HAS NOT DEGENERATED INTO PERSONAL ATTACKS. LAST WEEK, FOR INSTANCE, PINERUA, IN AN OFF-THE-CUFF REMARK, ANNOUNCED GRANDLY THAT SOCIAL CHRISTIAN GOVERNMENTS ALWAYS LEAD DIRECTLY TO COMMUNISM, WITNESS

CHILE AND ITALY. HERRERA, FOR HIS PART, REPLIED JOocularly THAT HE WAS GLAD TO HEAR THIS, SINCE THAT MEANT THAT THE PEREZ ADMINISTRATION MUST BE COMMUNIST SINCE IT FOLLOWED A SOCIAL CHRISTIAN GOVERNMENT. THE CAMPAIGN HAS POINTED UP OTHER BASIC TENETS OF THE RULES OF THE GAME: THREE CENTRAL ONES APPEAR TO BE: A) THE "FOUNDING FATHERS," BETANCOURT AND CALDERA, ARE EXPECTED TO BE STATESMEN. WHEN CALDERA ACCUSED POWERFUL US ECONOMIC INTERESTS OF INDIRECTLY SUPPORTING THE PINERUA CAMPAIGN, THE PRESS WAS FULL OF COMMENT FOR DAYS, AND SOME COPEYANOS QUIETLY TOLD THE CONFIDENTIAL

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EMBASSY THAT OF COURSE CALDERA DID NOT MEAN THE USG WAS BEHIND SUCH MANEUVERS. THE SAME STATEMENTS FROM ANY OTHER COPEYANO WOULD HAVE BEEN VIRTUALLY IGNORED.

B) OIL - THIS WEEK THE GOV ANNOUNCED A 7 PERCENT REDUCTION IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR BUDGET BECAUSE OF REDUCED INCOME FROM OI EXPORTS. INTERESTINGLY ENOUGH, HERRERA ANNOUNCED THAT COPEI WOULD DEFEND THE ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE OF THE STATE PETROLEUM AGENCY SHOULD THE PEREZ ADMINISTRATION DECIDE TO FINANCE PART OF THE FINANCIAL SHORTFALL FROM INCREASED TAXES ON OIL REVENUES. HERRERA ALSO SAID, QUITE NATURALLY, THAT HIS ADMINISTRATION WOULD MANAGE THE PETROLEUM SECTOR WITH GREATER EFFICIENCY, BUT HE DID NOT FRONTALLY ATTACK AD FOR GROSS MISMANAGEMENT OF THE PETROLEUM INDUSTRY. SIMPLY PUT, PETROLEUM IS TOO SENSITIVE AN ISSUE HERE TO BE TREATED IN THE AD HOC AND CAVALIER FASHION RESERVED FOR MOST OTHER CAMPAIGN ISSUES;

C) THERE IS LITTLE SYSTEMATIC DISCUSSION OF ISSUES. NEITHER MAJOR PARTY HAS YET PRODUCED A PLATFORM, BUT EVEN WHEN THEY DO, NO ONE EXPECTS THAT THERE WILL BE FOLLOW-UP TO THE CAMPAIGN PROMISES IN THE FORMS OF WRITTEN DOCUMENTATION WITH DISCUSSION TALKING POINTS, WHITE PAPERS, ETC. THE CAMPAIGN TO DATE REVEALS THAT THE CANDIDATES DO NOT EXPECT TO BE QUESTIONED SYSTEMATICALLY ABOUT ISSUES. SIMPLY PUT, SUBSTANCE, AT LEAST IN THE US MEANING OF THE TERM, IS NOT A PART OF POLITICS HERE. THIS IN PART IS DUE TO THE LACK OF EFFECTIVE INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM AND PARTLY TO THE ILLITERACY RATE. TO THOSE FOLLOWING THE CAMPAIGN, HOWEVER, IT ADDS A CERTAIN SURREALISTIC DIMENSION AS THE CANDIDATES GO THROUGH THEIR PAGES.

4. THE INDEPENDENT VOTER. AS IN THE FOUR PREVIOUS DEMOCRATIC ELECTIONS, THE VOTER (DEFINED AS ONE WITHOUT SPECIFIC PARTY MEMBERSHIP OR COMMITMENT TO ANY PARTY-- APPROXIMATELY 60 PERCENT OF THE VOTING POPULATION OF 6 MILLION) WILL DECIDE THE ELECTION. HISTORIC VOTING PATTERNS

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INDICATE THAT AD HAS APPROXIMATELY 30 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE, COPEI, 15 PERCENT, AND THE OTHER MINOR PARTIES LESS. THUS FOR COPEI TO WIN IT IS NECESSARY TO GARNER A LARGE NUMBER OF INDEPENDENT VOTERS. IF THE PINERUA CAMPAIGN FALTERS, SOCIAL SERVICES CONTINUE TO DETERIORATE. OTTOLINA'S CANDIDACY TAKES SHAPE, AND COPEI CAN FIND BOTH THE FINANCING AND MOTIVATE THE GRASS ROOTS, THEN HERRERA COULD WELL BECOME THE NEXT PRESIDENT. AS REPORTED IN CARACAS A14, THIS IS A TALL ORDER, BUT BY NO MEANS AN IMPOSSIBILITY. VAKY

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Message Attributes

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